N.J. Native Americans - (Philhower articles)

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JERSEY INDIAN LORE

Indian boys play spear the hoop near wigwam as braves return from a hunt.

LEGENDS OF THE LENAPES

BY CHARLES A. PHILHOWER

This is the eighth in a series of articles about the Indians who once populated this state, written especially for The Newark Sunday News Magazine by Charles A. Philhower, authority on Indian lore. In subsequent articles Mr. Philhower will tell about the Lenni Lenape chiefs, where the Indians are today and how to search for Redskin relics.

LIFE of the New Jersey Indians was not all drudgery, as might be assumed from previous articles in this series. For diversion, the redmen who once lived here played games of skill and engaged in ceremonial dances. They were great story tellers and at the end of each day they would gather around the campfire to listen to an older member of the tribe relate folk lore and myths.

One game the Lenapes liked to play included the use of hoops and spears. When participating in this contest the Indians would line up on two sides, each player equipped with a spear. A hoop was rolled between the lines and the first Indian to cast his spear within the hoop was declared the winner.

The Lenapes also enjoyed engaging in feats of strength and powers such as running and swimming races, jumping, wrestling and shooting arrows at targets. They also had a game which corresponded to jumping rope. The rope was made of strips of skin tied together in a loop. When a boy could jump through this loop five times in succession without touching it he was allowed to eat the meat from an animal he had killed on the hunt.

Boys of different families in the tribes often went off together on hunting and fishing expeditions. On these forays they learned to use the rock shelters which the braves in the tribes had fitted out for emergency use.

THERE were pet dogs in every tribe and the puppies were as appealing to the children then as they are today. The mischief of young crows often afforded great amusement and one of the first ventures of a boy was to take young crows from the nest and bring them into camp, so that his playmates could watch their antics. Fawns were sought in the forest and when found were brought into the village to be tamed. It was not unusual to see the cubs of bears, pups of wolves and young raccoons which had been taken from their lairs, running about the village. These animals were sometimes used as effective decoys which enabled the Indians to get food without going far afield.

Insects, toads, young birds, newts, lizards, snakes, turtles and the like also amused both young and old. The story of the Grasshopper War in Holland Township, Hunterdon County, harks back to the amusements of primitive man. It is said that the Shawnee women from across the Delaware River in Pennsylvania came over to New Jersey to visit the women of the Munsee clan while the men of both tribes were away on a hunt. They brought their children with them and one of the Shawnee youngsters caught a large grasshopper and was playing with it when a Munsee child attempted to take it from him. The two fought for the grasshopper and others joined in until there was considerable disturbance in the village.

The squaws, in an attempt to separate the children, became involved in the altercation and there was a general free-for-all. At that moment the hunters came home. They took sides in the riot and many were killed or injured. The story goes that the settlers found many blanched skulls of the victims of what is known in history as the Grasshopper War between the Munsees and the Shawnees.

Jersey Indians, according to this drawing from the State Museum at Trenton, carved ceremonial masks from tree trunks, painted them with dyes.

MANY Lenape legends were handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth until the white man finally came to record them in writing. One of the most popular of these concerns a mythical Indian called "Weahquanookase" or "Weahqua" for short about whom the Lenape told tales from his boyhood until his death. Here are a few of these stories:

When Weahqua was a small boy he ran to the chief of his tribe one Fall day and asked if he could go with the hunting party. The chief said to him; "You are a little boy and you would be no good to the hunters." Weahqua pleaded to be allowed to go

Among the Lenape ceremonial masks in Mr. Philhower's collection is the one at the left which was believed worn by a member of the Unami tribe who lived near Metuchen. The crude mask at the right was obtained from Chief Logan, a Munsee.

and promised he would be of help to them. He thought he could kill a bear or a wild turkey or build a fire and prepare the meals. So the old "sakima" said he might go.

On the morning of the first day Weahqua told the hunt leader, "I can shoot a bear. Where will I find one?" The answer was: "You find bears in holes in trees." So Weahqua went off to find a bear and soon they heard him yelling for help. They all ran to him and much to their chagrin found Weahqua up a tree looking into a woodpecker's hole. The leader shouted: "What are you looking for, Weahqua?"

"I am looking for a bear."

"Why you haven't the sense you were born with, Weahqua. Bears are never found in woodpecker's holes."

"But," he said, "you told me bears were found in holes in trees." This is a hole in a tree. If I could not find one in a woodpecker's hole you should have told me so."

THE next day Weahqua went to the leader and said, "I can shoot a turkey with my boy and arrow. May I go into the woods and get one?"

"Yes," said the leader, "it would be good for the hunters when they come in at night to have turkey cooked in bear's fat."

Weahqua rushed off into the forest to get a turkey. Soon he saw one weaving its head back and forth behind a log. He shot an arrow and wounded it. The bird flapped away, but he ran and caught it and took the squawking gobbler back to camp. When the hunters came in at night they found Weahqua holding the live turkey by the legs and dipping it in bear's fat in the big pot over the fire. The much disturbed leader said:

"Weahqua, now I know you have no sense. I meant you should have killed the turkey and cooked it in bear's fat." To which Weahqua replied, Then you should have told me so."

ACCORDING to legend, Weahqua was a very likely little boy. When he came to his 14th year he asked if he might go on the hunt in the Fall. The old sakima of the camp said, "No, you have not yet been made a hunter and a brave. You have no sacred animal. You must go into the forest and find one." Weahqua then asked the sakima if he would take him into the forest to find his sacred animal, his totem for the war path and the chase. It was the custom of any Lenape of note to have a totem to which he would pray or make sacrifice in case of danger or in need of food.

The old sakima told Weahqua to come to his wigwam in the morning before daybreak and he would take him over the mountain into the forest to find his sacred animal. This Weahqua did. Before leaving the old sakima's wigwam they took charcoal from the fire pit, crushed it in their hands and rubbed it over their faces. They started on their way. Every Indian who saw them knew by the black on their faces that they were going out to find the boy's sacred animal. No harm was done to them and every Indian who saw them wished them well.

Over the mountain and into the strange forest they traveled, one day, two days, even three days before they came to a stopping place. When the old sakima found a suitable location to build a shelter on a hillside near a spring they threw down their burdens and began prepara-

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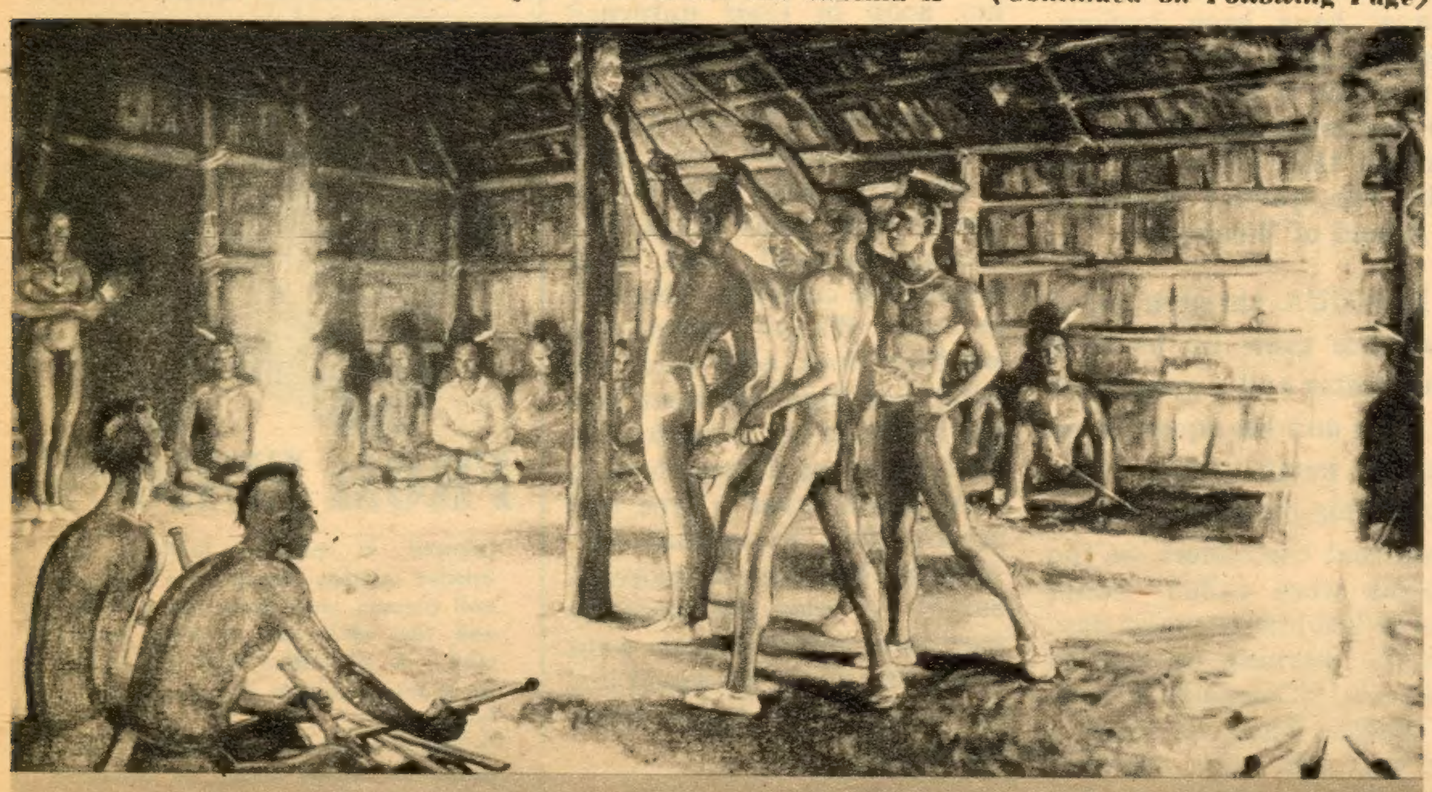

The Indians in this drawing from the State Museum are taking part in a ceremonial dance in a long house which was the common meeting place of a Lenape tribe.

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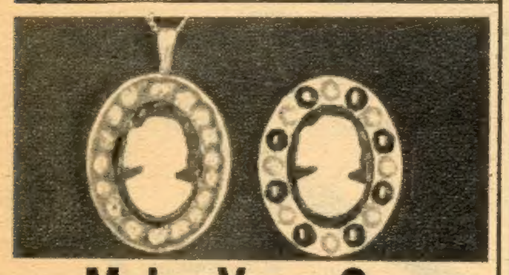

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Jersey Indians

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)

tions for encampment. First they set a large post in the ground, then they placed poles around it. These they bent over and lashed together at the top for a shelter. Cross bars were fastened about the enclosure to give it strength against wind and enemy onslaught. A fire was built on the ground nearby and just as the shelter seemed complete the old sakima seized the boy and tied him to the post. There Weahqua found himself at the end of the day with darkness coming on, tied helpless to the post. When he looked about for the old sakima he was nowhere in sight.

THE night grew dark for there was no moon. Soon he heard owls screeching and old Nohomus, the great horned owl calling in the distance, "Whoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, whooo whoo." It was an unknown land and a dark night. Weahqua thought of crying for help but he knew his courage was being tested and if he called for help he would not find his sacred animal.

The fire flickered at his feet and all at once there seemed from every direction fiery eyes peering at him from the dark. The animals of the woods were curious about this new object among them. They were so close he could hear them snivel. Bears came grunting about and in the distance wolves howled.

Soon wild cats began to scream and more fiery eyes peered at him from the dark. Would they rush upon him and tear him to pieces? He dare not cry for help. As the night wore on more owls hooted, more wolves howled, more bears growled about, more wild cats screamed and more fiery eyes peered at him from the dark. Weahqua bit his lips, clinched his fists, and vowed not to cry for help even though he should lose his life.

After long and wearisome hours the daylight came. The woods were the same, but the fire was out. No animals could be seen anywhere and the old sakima was nowhere in sight. Without food and drink and the fear of danger about him Weahqua fell asleep. When he awoke the fire at his feet had been kindled anew and the night was coming on.

Soon darkness was upon him. The grunts and cries and fiery eyes were worse than the night before, and he felt famished for food and drink, but he knew he must be brave and not give in if he were to find his sacred animal. So the night was long and his courage to withstand the test was ebbing away. He would not call for help. At last the daylight arrived and with it came the old sakima.

Weahqua, legendary Indian boy, is depicted here tramping through the woods on his way to find a bear in a woodpecker's hole, according to story.

A bowl was handed him with a drink that he greedily swallowed down. This was a concoction of Jamestown weed that the old Indian had brought with him. Immediately it threw Weahqua into a fainting stupor. Horrible dreams followed. Wolves may threaten to tear him to pieces, an eagle may swoop down and seize him with its talons, rattlesnakes may come sizzling about; but were he strong enough the spell would pass and the old sakima would give him fresh water to drink, nourishing food to eat, and back to the village they would go.

On his return there was rejoicing and queries of what had happened. He would tell his story and the eagle which stood out most prominently in his tale, became his totem, his guardian angel in warfare and on the hunt. Then he could give the war cry of the Lenape, "Husca n' lenape win," which meant, "I, a Lenape, have been huskanawed. I have been made a warrior and a hunter." It is said that many young Lenape lads won their totems by following the practice related in the legend of Weahqua.

WEAHQUA through much experience grew up to be a great hunter and a great warrior. He and his squaw lived together many years. One night in his old age he had a dream that the adders, as the Iroquois were called, would come to kill him the next day.

In the morning he said to his squaw: "Company is coming today. They are from a long way off. Put the pot over the fire and have the mess boiling hot for they will be cold and hungry."

So the pot was boiling fiercely in the afternoon when Weahqua saw some warriors coming. He shouted to them, "Husca n'lenape win." They did not understand the cry and gave no answer. Then he knew they were enemies.

They came on to Weahqua' wigwam. He motioned them to sit down. This they did. Then he explained in sign language: "I knew you were coming. The Manitto told me so in a dream. You have come a long way. You are tired and hungry. My squaw has prepared food. Sit around the pot and I will serve you."

When they were seated, Weahqua took his big ladle and dipped it in the pot and brought it forth full of boiling hot soup. The Iroquois warriors were cold and hungry. They anxiously looked at him wondering who would be fed first. As he was about to offer it to the Indian at the head of the line he dashed the hot soup in their upturned faces. Blinded by this burning bath they all jumped up and ran away. By this means, Weahqua escaped their fury.

The story goes that Weahqua lived on many years, protecting himself and outwitting his enemies. One day in the Winter when the weather was cold and the wind was high, he went into the forest to get wood for the fire. They say a great branch blew down from a tree and struck him. From that time forth he was seen no more on earth. A wise old medicine man later said Weahqua went to heaven where he would live on forever in the happy hunting ground.

NEXT WEEK: Great chiefs of the Lenapes and how they governed and worshiped.

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